

NEED FOR NATIONAL HEALTHCARE

HON. DENNIS J. KUCINICH

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, June 8, 2005

Mr. KUCINICH. Mr. Speaker, on Saturday, May 21, I had the honor of chairing a citizens hearing on the need for national health care which took place in Aliquippa, Pennsylvania. I heard testimony from citizens from a wide variety of backgrounds including labor, elected officials, seniors, youth, and physicians and health care workers. What I heard powerfully demonstrates the need for fundamental changes in how America takes care of its people. The hearing clearly showed that the time is long overdue to bring our health care system up to the same standards that other industrialized countries have enjoyed for years. I wish to share some of the testimony I received with my colleagues.

Carol McMann, a retiree and an active member of the Steelworkers Organization of Active Retirees (SOAR) Chapter 2020:

"I am disappointed and frustrated about the way our health care system is going in the United States. A lot of people do not want national health care, but when you get in my situation it would be appreciated!"

"When LTV Steel liquidated and took my health insurance in the year 2002, it totally left me out in the cold."

"I had two choices for health care and the expensive one was the one that I had to take because I needed a prescription drug program. I had to purchase individual health care from Highmark Blue Shield/Blue Cross. If I chose an HMO and was accepted, then I had a year that I would not be covered for pre-existing conditions."

"This individual policy costs me \$411.95 a month with a \$1,000 deductible. It increases each year in September. Who knows what the total will be in two more years! My husband and I figured out our total cost for health care each year, including prescription drugs, and it came out to more than \$10,000. It takes all of my social security just to pay the premium alone. I am a homemaker!"

"At the end of the month, we have to watch because if our fixed income is gone, we must use our savings again and again. We fear it may be gone in the future. To wind this down, we no longer vacation, go on shopping sprees, buy our sons much, or enjoy life as before. It has depressed us at times and causes us to feel as though my husband worked for absolutely no reason! He served in the Army and also the Reserves. Our health care just meant everything to us in our retirement. Just everything!"

"We feel this administration and other elected leaders will not fix this problem. Everyone in this country now is just expected to take care of themselves."

Mike Sabat, an unemployed Anchor Hocking worker whose son Mikey suffers from autism:

"Whatever happened to the American dream of hard work at a good job with medical benefits? Now we have to ask employers what kind of medical insurance they offer, how much it costs, and then deal with an endless assortment of HMOs, PPOs, and managed care and third-party administrators. And don't forget the eye care, dental, orthotics, and mental health coverage. It seems like we have been working all our lives just for our medical benefits!"

"I am laid-off again at the present time, however, a union contract saved my medical insurance for four months."

"In a country so rich, no one should have to go without food, water, clothing, shelter, quality education, and especially health care!"

"People should not be in debt, as I am, over their medical insurance or bills!"

"Those commercials about insurance fraud kill me. I think when you have insurance and you go to the doctor or hospital thinking you are covered then you get a large bill, that's the real insurance fraud!"

Ian Thompson, a recent graduate of Penn State University who will soon be losing his health coverage:

"Simply put, to say that the current health care system is failing to meet the needs of America's young adults is at best a gross understatement. While young people between the ages of 19 to 29 account for a mere 15 percent of the U.S. population, they are disproportionately represented among the roughly 45 million Americans who currently lack health insurance, accounting for roughly 30 percent according to recent census figures. These findings have shown that young people account for the highest percentage of uninsured Americans."

"Nineteen to 29 year olds represent one of the biggest and fastest growing segments of the population living day to day without health insurance, yet individuals in this age group rarely appear in the national debate on health insurance."

"It probably comes as no surprise that one of the largest barriers for young adults in seeking health insurance coverage is cost. In many instances, the price of coverage simply rises faster than incomes, making it especially difficult for younger people to obtain coverage."

"For many younger people, the consequences of going without health insurance don't seem as immediate as cutting back on grocery bills, losing car insurance, or missing a rent or mortgage payment. So they decide to take a chance—a calculated risk that they won't face a serious and costly health crisis—and forgo health coverage for months and often years at a time. Sadly, for many this proves to be a devastating gamble. When catastrophes hit the uninsured, as they can and do to individuals in every age group, many are left completely buried in massive amounts of debt, unable to afford even basic medical necessities."

"With the numbers of uninsured Americans steadily increasing, today's young people face the sad prospect of being sicker and less economically productive over the course of their lives. Amid a soft job market and ever increasing insurance costs, many experts fear that more and more young adults will forgo medical care altogether. Research has in fact shown that it is a common practice among uninsured young people to go to a doctor less often and later into an illness, often ending up with so many other countless uninsured Americans in hospital emergency rooms for conditions that easily could have been treated at an earlier time."

Those who argue that younger adults are an age group that does not have the same health needs as other segments of the population simply have not been paying attention to the facts. Younger adults have the highest number of annual visits to emergency rooms each year (usually from injuries). They account for a third of new HIV diagnoses. And nearly four million pregnancies occur in women in their 20s every year. The results of a lack of insurance for young people are truly shocking and should act as a wake-up call to the consciences of Americans from across the political spectrum. The Institute of Medicine estimates that 18,000 young adults die each year because they lack health insurance to cover their problems. Additionally, uninsured adults are 25 percent

more likely to die prematurely than those with private health insurance coverage.

"There is something inherently perverted and fundamentally flawed with a health care system that prides itself as being the best and most advanced in the world while at the same time allowing 18,000 young people to die each and every year from illnesses and diseases that in many cases could be avoided with simple preventive treatment."

"The time is long overdue to change our outrageously costly and grossly inefficient health care system to one that meets the basic needs of the American public in terms of gaining universal, efficient, available, and affordable access to the highest quality health care. H.R. 676, the U.S. National Health Insurance Act goes a long way towards accomplishing this very goal. This legislation would improve and expand upon what older Americans already receive through the very successful Medicare program to include all U.S. residents. To say it is needed is an understatement. The current for-profit system of health care must be replaced with one that puts the interests of people first."

HONORING THE LIFE ACHIEVEMENTS OF JUANA BORDAS

HON. MARK UDALL

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, June 8, 2005

Mr. UDALL of Colorado. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Juana Bordas, a leader in Denver's Hispanic community and a great Coloradan. At a time when immigration is so hotly debated and in such divisive ways, the story of Juana Bordas is inspiring.

Juana Bordas was born in El Salvador, but emigrated to the United States from Nicaragua when she was just three years old. Her parents and her seven siblings made a difficult journey over many miles in the hull of a banana boat!

From these humble beginnings, Juana has gone on to become one of the most respected women in Colorado, not only as a member of the Colorado Women's Hall of Fame, but also the National Hispana Leadership Institute. From this place of stature, she speaks eloquently of the importance of embracing one's history—particularly for Latina women and their mothers. Juana said that it was difficult as a child to be poor and dark-skinned. She acknowledges that there were times as a child that she was embarrassed to know that her mother only achieved a fifth grade education, mothered eight children and worked in the cafeteria of Juana's elementary school. She says that the shame she once felt for her mother's history has now become a great source of pride. The tremendous courage and sacrifice her mother exhibited have been the foundation for her children to lead a better life. Juana calls this "servant leadership." She makes the point that instead of looking at her mother's experience as subservient, it really embodies the qualities of a true leader: hard work, driving purpose, courage and dedication to a cause greater than one's own self-interest. Those qualities should be admired, embraced and emulated as young Latinas strive to achieve their goals. From my vantage point, the example of Juana's mother—and Juana's own life—are truly inspiring.

In the early 1970s Juana Bordas started the MiCasa Resource Center for Women in Denver which continues to this day to help low-income Latinas and youth with job training and life skills. As President of a multicultural consulting firm, Mestiza Leadership International, she travels the country developing diversity in the workforce. She has said that, "my mission is to help with the birth of a multi-cultural nation." She notes how Latinos in other countries are heads of government and industry, and believes that there is no reason why it should be different here in the United States. Juana served with the Denver Election Commission to register more voters and to put her beliefs into practical effect. Today, Latino leaders are emerging in public office as never before. Thoughtful and hard-working people like Juana Bordas have helped to pave this path of progress.

Juana Bordas reminds of us of something that should be important to every American. Each of us owes an enormous debt to the strength and courage of families who sacrificed for their children in order to realize the American dream. Our country was founded by such people, and that continues to be our greatest strength. As a successful business woman, Juana Bordas has given an immeasurable amount back to our community in time, skill, wisdom, and by simply being a role model. It is with great admiration that I ask my colleagues to join me in honoring Juana Bordas, a great American success story and a woman worth knowing and learning from. I wish her continued success in the future.

BUSH AND THE G-8 AGENDA

HON. CHARLES B. RANGEL

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, June 8, 2005

Mr. RANGEL. Mr. Speaker, the current state of the African continent has been an ongoing issue of concern for policy makers in this country and elsewhere. As the rest of the world is reaping the rewards of development, Africa seems to be sinking deeper into a health and poverty crisis.

In pursuit of a solution, British Prime Minister Tony Blair met with President Bush at the White House yesterday to discuss next month's Group of Eight (G-8) summit. Specifically, the two men discussed Prime Minister Blair's ambitious plan to bring a historic combination of debt relief, trade concessions, and aid to the African continent.

A major component of the plan would entail a large increase of aid payments to Africa to around \$25 billion annually, before increasing to \$50 billion annually within three to five years. This would be in-line with the UN's goal to have industrialized nations allocate 0.7 percent of their GDP to development assistance. While Mr. Blair's exciting proposal should be applauded, agreement as to how it will be achieved is still awaited.

Mr. Blair and British Finance Minister Gordon Brown argue that the aid should be funded through a mechanism they call the "International Finance Facility" (IFF). The IFF would raise aid funds by issuing bonds on world capital markets. The IFF bonds would be backed by a promise from the G7 economic powers to repay them after 2015.

The Bush Administration has not been supportive of the IFF, which it views as incompatible with U.S. Congressional budgetary rules. However, while aspects of the IFF proposal may be problematic, the necessity for increased aid to Africa is not in question. At current assistance rates, Sub Saharan Africa will unquestionably fall short of the Millennium Development Goals to cut poverty on the continent in half by 2015. As such, Blair's call for further aid to the continent is merited.

To its credit, the Bush Administration has substantially increased aid to Sub-Saharan Africa, which amounted to around \$3.2 billion in 2004. Though this ranks the U.S. among the world leaders in total African assistance, we still trail much of the industrialized world in the amount of aid we give as a percentage of GDP. In addition, large amounts of the Bush Administration's aid pledges to Africa have been slow in coming. For example, the \$4 billion committed to the region under the Millennium Challenge Account has yet to actually be delivered in earnest. Indeed, a June 8th Op-Ed in New York Times entitled "Crumbs for Africa" describes just how much more we can do.

On Tuesday, the Bush Administration announced that the U.S. will provide \$674 million in additional famine assistance to Africa this year from funds already appropriated by Congress. While this is to be commended, Prime Minister Blair is pushing for a broad, long-term effort to help Africa's economy get on its feet, not just emergency food aid. He also wants G-8 countries to commit new money for Africa rather than reallocating funds already earmarked for foreign assistance. It is my hope that the Administration will work with its G-8 partners in the coming weeks to arrive at a more substantial and comprehensive aid package for Africa.

While the issue of increased aid will be difficult, the related goal of debt relief is very attainable, as long as all parties involved dedicate themselves to that outcome. Both Prime Minister Blair and Finance Minister Brown have voiced optimism about the prospects for reaching G-8 agreement on the issue. The U.S. and other G-8 members already agree in principle on 100 percent debt relief for Africa's poorest nations, but the exact formula for how the debt will be cancelled is still being resolved.

The U.S. is calling for a simple write-off of the debt, while Britain and others have called for the debt to be paid off, so as to replenish the resources of the International Development Banks. Among other things, Blair advocates selling a portion of International Monetary Fund (IMF) gold reserves to help pay off the debt. Whatever the mechanism, Africa needs debt relief as soon as possible. Many African countries are crippled by debt burdens that in some cases consume nearly 40 percent of their annual budgets. It is thus imperative that negotiations on this issue continue.

President Bush now has a golden opportunity to join with Prime Minister Blair and other members of the G-8 in helping to establish a new era for Africa. Such an opportunity is unprecedented in Africa's post colonial history. To turn back now would be more than shameful.

The United States has already spent nearly \$200 billion on the war in Iraq—a country of 26 million people. Prime Minister Blair is calling on us to now spend a few billion dollars

more to help save an entire continent encompassing over 700 million people. That is what I call making our money count, and the legacy of such an effort will yield immeasurable benefits for Africa, and the world as a whole.

Again, I thank Mr. Blair for his bold and ambitious vision, and I pray that our country will be able to stand with him in making it a reality.

[From the New York Times, June 8, 2005]

CRUMBS FOR AFRICA

President Bush kept a remarkably straight face yesterday when he strode to the microphones with Britain's prime minister, Tony Blair, and told the world that the United States would now get around to spending \$674 million in emergency aid that Congress had already approved for needy countries. That's it. Not a penny more to buy treated mosquito nets to help save the thousands of children in Sierra Leone who die every year of preventable malaria. Nothing more to train and pay teachers so 11-year-old girls in Kenya may go to school. And not a cent more to help Ghana develop the programs it needs to get legions of young boys off the streets.

Mr. Blair, who will be the host when the G-8, the club of eight leading economic powers, holds its annual meeting next month, is trying to line up pledges to double overall aid for Africa over the next 10 years. That extra \$25 billion a year would do all those things, and much more, to raise the continent from dire poverty. Before getting to Washington, Mr. Blair had done very well, securing pledges of large increases from European Union members.

According to a poll, most Americans believe that the United States spends 24 percent of its budget on aid to poor countries; it actually spends well under a quarter of 1 percent. As Jeffrey Sachs, the Columbia University economist in charge of the United Nations' Millennium Project, put it so well, the notion that there is a flood of American aid going to Africa "is one of our great national myths."

The United States currently gives just 0.16 percent of its national income to help poor countries, despite signing a United Nations declaration three years ago in which rich countries agreed to increase their aid to 0.7 percent by 2015. Since then, Britain, France and Germany have all announced plans for how to get to 0.7 percent; America has not. The piddling amount Mr. Bush announced yesterday is not even 0.007 percent.

What is 0.7 percent of the American economy? About \$80 billion. That is about the amount the Senate just approved for additional military spending, mostly in Iraq. It's not remotely close to the \$140 billion corporate tax cut last year.

This should not be the image Mr. Bush wants to project around a world that is intently watching American actions on this issue. At a time when rich countries are mounting a noble and worthy effort to make poverty history, the Bush administration is showing itself to be completely out of touch by offering such a miserly drop in the bucket. It's no surprise that Mr. Bush's offer was greeted with scorn in television broadcasts and newspaper headlines around the world. "Bush Opposes U.K. Africa Debt Plan," blared the headline on the AllAfrica news service, based in Johannesburg. "Blair's Gambit: Shame Bush Into Paying" chimed in The Sydney Morning Herald in Australia.

The American people have a great heart. President Bush needs to stop concealing it.